

REMARKS

Claims 25-32, 57-63, and 77-81 are pending. No claims are amended at this time.

The Applicant notes with appreciation the Examiner's acceptance of the originally filed drawings, as well as the Examiner's acknowledgment of the Applicant's information disclosure statement filed on June 3, 2004.

Claims 25-32, 57-63, and 77-81 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sasai (U.S. Patent Application No. 2004/0247023) in further view of Maeki (U.S. Patent Application No. 2003/0228857).

The Applicant traverses this rejection, as neither Sasai or Maeki are prior art under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

In more detail, the effective filing date of the Applicant's application is October 10, 2000, which is the filing date of the parent application (U.S. Application No. 09/685,715, now U.S. Patent No. 6,885,847). Because the Applicant's application is a proper divisional application of that parent application, it is entitled to the filing date of the parent (e.g., see MPEP § 706.2, part V "If the application is a continuation or divisional of one or more earlier U.S. applications or international applications and if the requirements of 35 U.S.C. 120 and 365(c), respectively, have been satisfied, the effective filing date is the same as the earliest filing date in the line of continuation or divisional applications").

With regard to the cited references, Sasai was filed on October 16, 2002 and claims priority to a JP application filed on October 16, 2001. Maeki was filed on June 6, 2002. As such, neither of the cited references has an effective filing date prior to the effective filing date of the Applicant's application.

On February 21, 2006, the Examiner granted the Applicants' attorney the courtesy of a telephonic interview. The purpose of the interview was to discuss the effective filing dates of the Applicant's application and the cited references. Upon review of the application file, the Examiner agreed with the Applicant's position that the cited references of Sasai and Maeki are not prior art, and asked the Applicant to file this response. The Examiner further indicated he would perform additional searching, based on the effective filing date of the Applicant's application.

The Applicant believes the above remarks to be fully responsive. Favorable action is solicited. The Applicant kindly invites the Examiner to contact the undersigned attorney by telephone, facsimile, or email for efficient resolution, if there are any remaining issues.

Respectfully submitted,
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